

MEDIA ADVISORY

August 7, 2003

Mayor Bob Young and Commissioner Bill Kuhlke Wednesday met with Veterans Administration officials in Washington to offer support to the Augusta VA Medical Center during the current system re-alignment.

Mayor Young said: "It is important to the more than 25,000 veterans who live in our area that they continue to have access to care close to home. Also important to our city is the 2,000 jobs provided by the VA."

Monday, the VA recommended that future uses of the Uptown Division be "studied," with one option being a privately run assisted living facility. The VA's report also failed to specifically recognize the on-going collaborations between the VA and MCG and the VA and Eisenhower Army Medical Center. Recommendations for new outpatient clinics in Aiken and Athens and expansion of the spinal cord unit were also included.

The mayor said: "Our message was that the local VA management has already submitted a plan for the Uptown Division that strengthens the missions now being accomplished there, so more studies are not needed. Likewise, we were able to share a three page list of specific areas that link the VA, MCG and Eisenhower."

Mayor Young and Commissioner Kuhlke met with Laura J. Miller, Deputy Under Secretary for Health and William McLemore, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Intergovernmental Affairs.

The VA's report was presented Monday to the Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) Commission. The Commission will hold a series of public hearings and make recommendation to the VA Secretary later this year.

According to Mayor Young, it is important that the voices of local veterans and citizens be heard. The best way to communicate with the CARES Commission is through its website: www.carescommission.va.gov

"Just as we work to protect Savannah River Site and Ft. Gordon, it is time to step up to the plate for our VA Medical Center," said Mayor Young.